

May 14, 1999
Consumers United for Food Safety
P.O. Box 22928
Seattle, WA 98122
phone 425-747-2659

Docket Management Branch
Food & Drug Administration
5630 Fishers Lane, Room 1061
Rockville, MD 20852

RE: **Docket No. 98N-1038**

Irradiation in the Production, Processing, and Handling of Food

Introduction

Consumers United for Food Safety (CUFFS) focuses on consumer issues dealing with food production, safety, consumer labeling and the broader consequences of new food technologies. We have been working on food irradiation since 1982. We are a non-profit organization with approximately 1000 members, mostly from the Pacific Northwest. We urge consumers to become educated and active on food policy matters.

Since FDAMA instructed the FDA to reconsider the labeling of irradiated foods- not only in regard to the size of labeling but also nomenclature and a possible expiration date- we wish to submit the following comments.

Nomenclature

Regardless of Congressional intent, you note that the FDA by law is required to use labeling statements that are not misleading. You also note that there is no consensus in regard to nomenclature for irradiated foods. In general, business interests tend to prefer statements such as "cold pasteurization" or "electronic pasteurization" which they view as "less alarming" to potential sales while consumers prefer the term "irradiated." However, labeled irradiated foods have been sold at Carrot Top grocery and others, and the term "irradiated" is an accurate description for the process. Many countries abroad require that irradiated foods be labeled as "irradiated." It would seem a concession to business interests, complicate international trade and make consumers feel that business interests were trying to "disguise the process" if your labeling requirements were changed at this point in time. Your job is to determine safety and provide honest labeling- not to accommodate business interests at the expense of confusing consumers. A consumer should not have to ask a grocery store manager- "Has this product been heat-treated or irradiated?" It should be clear from the label. An optional radura would be handy for a quick visual clue but not a substitute for the written word "irradiated" and a radura would never be understood by all consumers. No one should have to ask - "What does this symbol mean?" Since there are other methods of reducing bacterial contamination in meat (steam pasteurization, dealing with E-coli on the farm through diet and the addition of competitive bacteria, ozone washes, better inspection, etc.), it is not the FDA's role to play word games that would favor one method over another.

Expiration Date

We urge you to label irradiated foods as “irradiated” and the labeling requirement should be **permanent**. Consumers will always want to know that a food has been irradiated since irradiation can affect the smell, taste, texture and nutrition of a food item and it may otherwise be confused with unprocessed food.

Size of Labeling

In regard to reducing the nomenclature of irradiated foods to “ingredient size,” we don’t see how that would be practical for bulk produce- where a large sign would probably be employed. Ingredient-size would make sense if it were part of an ingredient list but any other labeling should be easy to read and placed in close proximity to the name of the food. Since the USDA and consumers also call for the labeling of irradiated ingredients, we urge you to consider labeling irradiated ingredients as well as whole foods.

Summary

We feel that you fulfilled your obligations for truthful labeling with your original labeling requirements which were finalized over a period of years with continuous input from all parties and which are consistent with Codex. Any size reduction in labeling should be consistent with regular packaging or bulk produce requirements. There is a consensus among consumers. Consumers have always wanted straight-forward, prominent, conspicuous labeling of irradiated foods by using the term “irradiated.” A free market depends on truthful information.

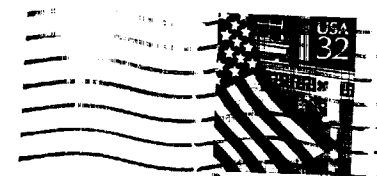
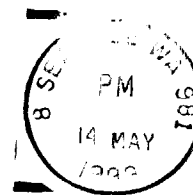
Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Connie Wheeler". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Connie Wheeler
Managing Director
Consumers United for Food Safety (CUFFS)



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Docket Management Branch (HFA-305)
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